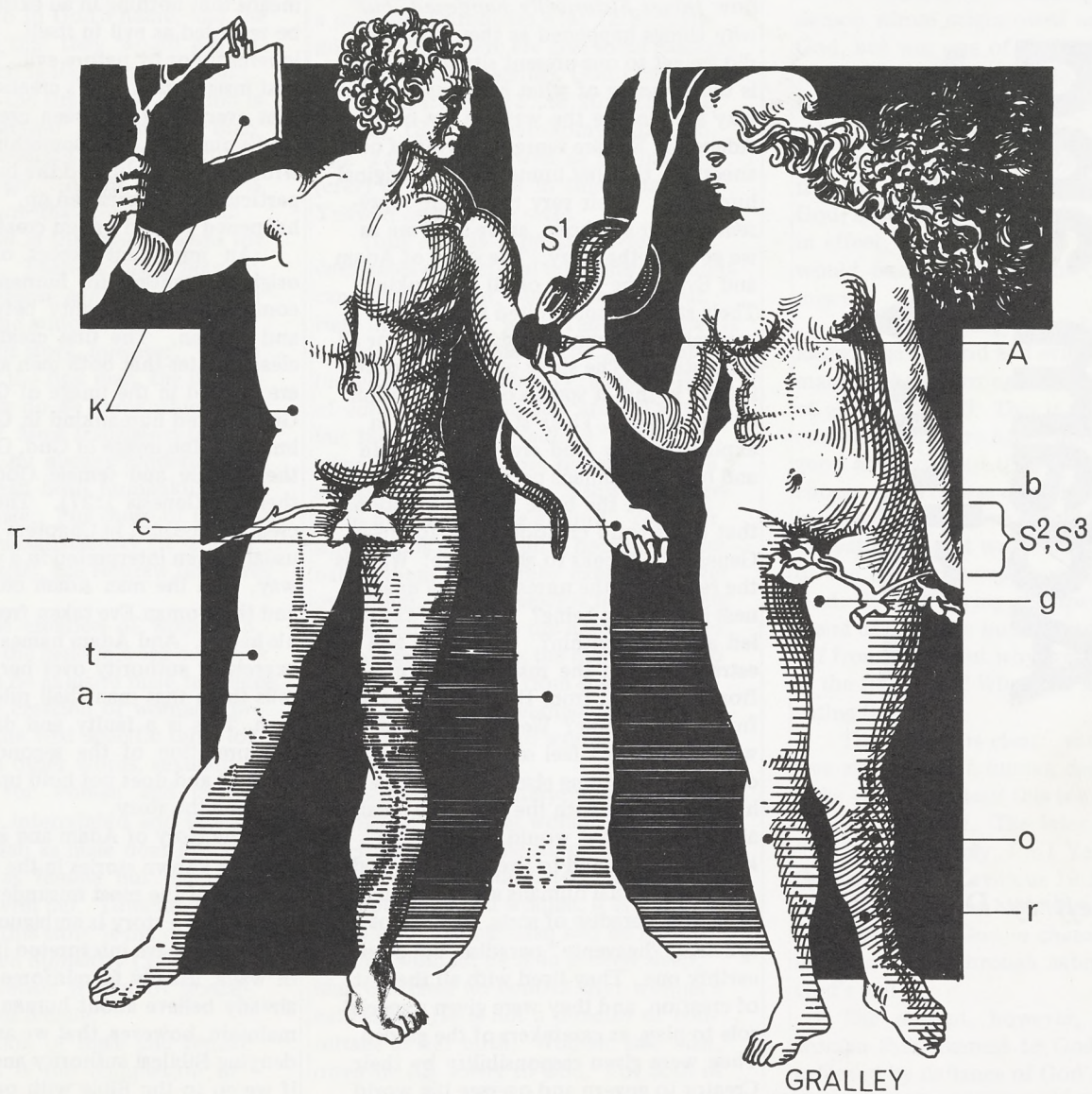


THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of
theological
reflection
from Metropolitan
Community Church

\$1.00

PULLING • DEACON • ZIEGLER Adam & Eve Revisited



SECOND QUARTER 1980

Adam and Eve: a story for all time

By Jeffrey D. Pulling

THE STORY OF Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 - 3 has usually been interpreted in very narrow and oppressive ways. It has been used to stifle all other explanations of how this world came to be. It has been used to oppress women. And it has been used to justify human exploitation and rape of the natural world. None of these was the intent of the Yahwist author, who was a feminist and ecologist way ahead of his time, and who told a mythic story to explain what had gone wrong with God's beautiful creation.

The Hebrew way of expressing what went wrong with God's original intentions for humankind and the rest of the world was to tell a story. In Genesis 2 - 3 we have a story that uses mythical language and concepts.

Now by "mythical", I do not mean untrue, false, or misleading. Myth means symbolic language, and it explains not how *things historically happened*, but *why* things happened as they did, how did we get to our present situation, what is the *meaning* of what happened, and why are we like the way we are now. Adam and Eve are representatives of our ancestors, the first humans or the original humanity. Their very names are representative or symbolic, as we shall see as we get into the story. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of all humankind. Their story is not limited to the first generation of humankind; it is true for all generations. The story of Adam and Eve is true, in that it speaks of the condition of all people. Their story is true in explaining how God created the world and how we humans perverted it.

Some of the basic human questions that the second creation story found in Genesis 2 - 3 seeks to answer are: What is the reason for the unrest and the uneasiness in my very being? Why am I troubled and torn within? Why do I feel estranged from the rest of the world, from the earth, from the animals, even from other people? We are all part of this world; why do I feel separated and cut off from everything else? Is it because I have lost touch with the God who created all of this? What would it be like to know this God and to live with this God?

The original humans are depicted as living in a paradise of sorts. It was not a spiritual, "heavenly" paradise, but a very earthly one. They lived with all the rest of creation, and they were given a special role to play, as caretakers of the garden. They were given responsibility by their Creator to govern and oversee the world

wisely. By their act of disobedience they did not "fall" from some spiritual realm or union with God. Rather they were ejected from their earthly paradise.

This means that there is no supra-worldly realm where humankind originally was and to which we essentially belong. Humankind was created to live in this world, in this time and space. The original created state of humankind was wholeness in this world and harmony with all of creation; that was God's intent for humankind. By an act of disobedience, however, humankind became alienated from this world, indeed a stranger to life.

One of the insights of the first creation story (Genesis 1) is that the world is good. God's creation is good. The text is very clear: God looked upon everything that God made, and it was good. The world was created by a good God to carry out God's purposes. This means that nothing in all existence should be regarded as evil in itself. Nothing is inherently or by nature evil. This is the first insight, that God's creation is good, that everything has been created for God's purposes. But something has gone wrong. The world, and the human race in particular, has "screwed up." Something happened to God's good creation.

An important aspect of God's original intention for humankind was complementary equality between men and women. The first creation story clearly states that both men and women are created in the image of God. "So God created humankind in God's own image; in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them" (Genesis 1:27). The second creation account in Chapters 2 and 3 has usually been interpreted in a very sexist way, with the man Adam created first and the woman Eve taken from him to be his helper. And Adam names Eve, thus exercising authority over her, and God tells them that man shall rule over woman. This is a faulty and dangerous interpretation of the second creation account and does not hold up when we examine the story.

The story of Adam and Eve is one of the best known stories in the Bible, but also one of the most misunderstood. It is true that the story is ambiguous at points, and people have interpreted it in a variety of ways, usually to reinforce what they already believe about human nature. I maintain, however, that we are in effect denying Biblical authority and inspiration if we go to the Bible with our minds

already made up about something and we search there for reinforcement of our views. If we really believe that the Bible records the Word of God to our world, then we will let it speak to us.

With this in mind, let us approach Genesis 2 - 3 again and look at it in a fresh way. Let us re-read this Hebrew story which was told to explain what went wrong with God's good creation, how humans perverted the goodness of God's created order, how humans have fallen short of the life for which God created them.



The second creation story actually starts at verse 4b of chapter 2. The first act of creation here is the creation of the human being (2:7), and Yahweh God puts the human in the garden to "till it and keep it" (2:15). By this responsibility and by being allowed to name the animals, humankind is set over the rest of creation. Humans are to govern affairs on earth in God's name, and the assumption is that they would govern responsibly, acting like Yahweh would.

I say that the first act of creation is that of "humankind", and not of "man", because that is what the Hebrew words in this story suggest. "Adam" or *adham* is the first creature that God made. In Hebrew, *adham* is the generic word for "humankind". There is also a play on words here because *adham* was formed from the ground which is *adamah*.

Also in this story, however, "Adam" is the name of the first man, the primordial male. How do we know which way to translate it? Most translators take the easy way out by always rendering it "man", to mean both humankind in general and male. For those of us for whom this is unsatisfactory (it is both sloppy and sexist), the Hebrew text gives us some help.

Before the creation of woman in 2:21-23, only the generic word *adham* is used. There is no exclusive male reference. Only with the creation of woman (*ish-shah*) occurs the first specific term for male (*ish*). In other words, sexuality is simultaneous for woman and man. The sexes are interrelated and interdependent. Man as male does not precede woman as female but happens concurrently with her. Thus the first act of creation in this story is the creation of undifferentiated humanity (2:7), and the last act of creation is that of sexuality, of male and female.

The creation of male and female human beings is the completion of

creation, just as it is in the first creation account (1:26-28). There is no reason to infer that woman is secondary or inferior because she was created after man, almost as an afterthought. In the first place, this is not so; male and female are simultaneous. Secondly, there is nothing wrong or inferior with being created last. In Genesis 1 the creation of humankind, male and female, is the very last act and is viewed as the culmination. God's crowning touch. So it is with the second story, too.

Some have maintained that woman is inferior to man because she was created to be his helper. Genesis 2:18, "Then Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that *adham* should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

The Hebrew word for helper is *ezer*, and it can be used in a variety of ways. Here in Genesis 2 it refers to the animals and to woman. Elsewhere in the Old Testament it can be the proper name for a male ((1 Chronicles 4:4; 12:9; Nehemiah 3:19). There are also some passages in which *ezer* describes God (Psalms 121:2; 124:8; 146:5; 33:20; 115:9-11; Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29). Yahweh is viewed as the helper (*ezer*) of Israel, and in this capacity Yahweh creates and saves.

Thus *ezer* is a relational term; it designates a beneficial relationship, and it can refer to God, people, or animals. Here in Genesis 2, what Yahweh desires is a helper fit for *adham*. The word "fit" (*neged*) connotes *equality*, a counterpart of *adham*. The animals are helpers but they fail to fit "*adham*". There is some physical rapport between *adham* and the animals because Yahweh formed them both out of the ground. Yet their similarity is not equality, because *adham* names them and thereby exercises power over them. No fit helper is found among the animals. And so the narrative moves on to woman, who is the helper equal to man. Thus *ezer*, far from suggesting an inferior status for woman, is a clear indication of man and woman being equal counterparts.

Some Biblical interpreters have taught an inferior status for woman because she was formed from the rib of *adham*. This is also an unsubstantiated assessment. For both man and woman, it is Yahweh alone who creates. Man had no part in making woman; he is in a deep sleep. Man exercises no control over woman's existence. He is not a director or consultant at her birth. Woman, like man, owes her life solely to God. For both of

them the origin of life is a divine mystery.

The woman is in fact equal to man. He *calls* her "woman", which is a descriptive term which designates gender. He does not name her, which is in contrast to *adham's* relationship with the animals. *Adham* does name the animals and thus exercises dominion and responsibility over them. Those who know the rest of this second creation story will, of course, point out that in Genesis 3:20 that the man does name the woman "Eve", but notice that this is *after their disobedience and their judgment by God*. Woman and man were created equals. Neither has authority over the other. And chapter 2 ends (vs. 25), and they "were both naked, and they were not ashamed."

As we move in chapter 3, we encounter the serpent in verse 1. The serpent has often been interpreted as a demon or as the Devil himself, but there is no indication in the text itself that this is so. The serpent in verse 1 is not a demon whose origin owed nothing to God, but was one of the wild animals which Yahweh had made, a fellow creature. The serpent is portrayed as a subtle liar who misleads the woman in telling her that by eating of the forbidden tree she and her husband would be like God, knowing good and evil. This was, in effect, a lie because the real result would be alienation from God and misery.

The terminology used here, "the knowledge of good and evil", has puzzled many. What is wrong with the knowledge of good and evil? This is what most ethical systems are based upon: knowing good and evil, and thus being able to choose one's course of action accordingly. Why was this tree forbidden? Why did eating from it wreck human life? Part of the answer stems from disobeying God. By disobeying the specific command of God, the humans cut themselves off from God. But why was it forbidden in the first place? What was wrong with eating this fruit?

The answer is clear: eating of this tree stems from a human desire to be "like God." In itself this is a right and reasonable desire. The later command, "You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2), makes it clear that humans have the potential to become like God *in character*. This likeness comes through submission to God's will.

The serpent, however, tells the woman that likeness to God is to be achieved by defiance of God's command,

and that the likeness to God which is within human reach is in terms of *power*, not character. The serpent suggests that the humans can make themselves the equal of God. This is what is wrong with "knowing good and evil." It is a human attempt to order life, to make choices, and to determine what is the right course, all without God. It is an attempt to define right and wrong without reference to God. God's will alone determines what is right and wrong, and what is good and evil. The first humans tried to bypass this and seize the power of determining good and evil. In other words, they tried to be "God" for themselves, to be their own moral authority. This is why their relationship with God was severed, and this is why everything else in human life became so distorted, because they tried to make it on their own without acknowledging their Creator, the one in whom is their source and their destiny.

The first result of the act of disobedience is described in 3:7. Whereas before they had walked about innocently naked, now they are ashamed of their own bodies and cover them up. This is alienation from one's own body and in particular alienation from one's own sexuality, because the part that is covered up is, of course, the genitals.

There has been much speculation and writing about sexual intercourse as the original sin, and thus sex is forever tainted. I think that this is reading our own hang-ups about sex into the text. That is not in the story itself. Sexuality was created by God and is therefore good (2:18, 22b, 23, 24). "Cleave to" does not mean to hold hands; there is no reservation in speaking openly about sexual relations. Sexuality has been ordained by God for the purpose of companionship. Note that there is no mention of procreation ("multiplying and filling the earth") as is in the first creation story (Genesis 1:28). The purpose of sexuality in this second story is for companionship in the full sense of that word. This sexual relationship, however, became infected with evil when the humans, in their desire for power disobeyed God. The impaired relationship between humankind and God throws the relationship between man and woman into disorder.

So we turn now to the results of this disobedience as recorded in 3:14-19, commonly called the "curses." Note, however, that only the serpent is cursed, but the woman and the man are not. They are judged, and the judgments are commentaries on the disastrous effects

of their shared disobedience. They show how terrible and distorted human life has become.

We misunderstand if we take these judgments to be mandates or commands from God. These verses describe the human situation that results from sin; they do not prescribe proper, right human behavior.

Of special concern are the words telling the woman that her husband shall rule over her (3:16b). This statement is not license for male supremacy, but rather it is a condemnation of it. Subjugation and supremacy are perversions of the order God created. Through disobedience the woman has become slave. The man is corrupted also, for he has become master, ruling over the one who is his God-given equal. The subordination of female to male signifies their shared sin.

This sin affects all relationships: between animals and human beings (vs. 15), woman and her body especially in childbirth (vs. 16a), man and woman (vs. 16b), man and the soil (vss. 17, 18), and man and his work (vs. 19). Whereas in creation man and woman know harmony and equality, in sin they experience alienation and discord. Everything is "screwed up". They are ejected from their earthly paradise and from then on they live a life of frustration, pain, and strife. One sign of this resulting alienation is that the man names the woman Eve. By naming her, as *adham* had previously done for the animals, he exercises his control and dominance over her.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil stands throughout human history as a constant temptation to people. Humans are always trying to order their lives and determine what is best for themselves without reference to God. These attempts always distort life, but humans keep trying.

Chapters 4 through 11 tell the subsequent history of humankind also in mythic terms. Everything is perverted. Things go from bad to worse. The alienation which humans feel causes hatred and murder, refusal to listen to God, and attempts to build up power and prestige. Sin is the separation from God that subsequently distorts all of life.

○

Into this historical mess God steps and calls one person, Abraham. Through Abraham and his descendants God works to end this alienation and to bring about reconciliation. This is the story of the Old Testament. This is not the place to

elaborate on the rest of the Old Testament, but I do want to point out that the vision that the prophets of Israel had of the new messianic age (the coming day of Yahweh) included a reversal of the judgments in Genesis 3. Isaiah spoke of harmony in the animal world, and between animals and humans (Isaiah 11:6-9). Micah prophesied of reconciliation between the earth and humans, with the consequence that people would not have to eke out a living from the soil but enjoy this world (Micah 4:3-4). Along this same line Amos described a time to come when the earth would bring forth abundantly and people would be able to enjoy the fruits of their previous labors (Amos 9:13-15). Jeremiah made a startling statement about a reversal of the roles of women and men, with women being on top this time (Jeremiah 31:22). Then of course in the New Testament Paul speaks of there being no male or female, no Jew or Gentile, no slave or free, but all being one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

The second creation story in Genesis 2 - 3 clearly shows that God did not create the world so that there would be alienation, domination, sexism, frustration, pain, etc. These are things that human beings have brought upon themselves. These are "demonic" forces that enslave humans, hold them down, and from which they need to be released. The intention of God for creation is harmony: among humans, between humans and the rest of creation, and within human nature itself. All of this, however, has been warped and distorted by the willful rebellion of humans.

This sets the stage for all the rest of the Biblical drama that follows. The "fall" of humanity from God's original purposes and God's continuing efforts to restore these purposes is basic to understanding everything else in the Bible. The story of Adam and Eve is the Prologue.

In this Genesis account itself nothing is said about the long-term, lasting consequences of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. They bring these judgments or punishments upon themselves, but their descendants are not mentioned. Adam and Eve, however, are *understood* to be representative figures for all of humankind. That which happened to them happened to all people. Through their disobedience, sin and the tragic consequences of sin came into this world.

○

Adam is the representative figure for the old humanity, that is not Adam the first man, but *adham* the pioneer human

being. In 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 Paul refers to Adam as the first human and to Christ as the second human. "The first human was from the earth, a human of dust; the second human is from heaven. As was the human of dust, so are those who are of the dust. And as is the human of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the human of dust, we shall also bear the image of the human of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47-49). Adam symbolizes the old humanity and Christ the new.

In Romans 5:12-21 Paul emphasized that all of us sinned in Adam, the primordial human being. All people are sinners, Paul maintains, but we do not die for our own sins. How do we know that? Because, Paul argues, death reigned even before the time of Moses when the law was given. Even before people could be held accountable for transgressing against the will of God, they were still dying. Thus it is not for our own sins that we are liable to death. We die because we sinned in Adam, because the original representative of humanity disobeyed, and we are all physically members of the old humanity.

What does the primordial human being *adham* have to do with us? The idea of original sin comes into play here. In Paul's argument in Romans 5, it is *not* that all sinned in the same way as Adam; vs. 14 says that "death reigned...even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam..." Neither is Paul saying that we all inherited from Adam the tendency to sin. The point that Paul does make here is that all humans sinned *in* Adam; all literally and actually sinned in Adam.

This concept is foreign to our modern Western minds. Our culture and religions are very individualistic. The Jewish tradition out of which Paul came, like many other cultures and religions, however, emphasized the people as a whole, as a collective unity, rather than as individual persons. If one person sinned, the guilt was laid not just at his or her feet; the whole people to whom that person belonged was treated as guilty. There was real solidarity; what happened to one happened to all.

Then Paul moves to the other side of his argument. Into this world of Adam-identified people Christ came. Just as people were constituted sinners by Adam's sin, now they are constituted righteous by Christ's obedience. The same solidarity that involved humankind in the sin of Adam also involves human-

kind in the holiness of Christ. The perfect obedience of Christ broke the chain of sin and death. The process which began in Adam of always going towards death and destruction was reversed in Christ. This argument of Paul rests, of course, on the fact that Jesus Christ was fully human (as well as fully divine). The whole argument collapses unless Jesus is as human as Adam. Humans are identified with the sin of Adam just by virtue of their humanity, but they can also be identified with the obedience of Christ.

If we are to be members of the new humanity, we must make a conscious decision to join. We can be in Christ just as we are in Adam, but only if we actually become members of the body of Christ. This means to *identify* with Christ and actually become "Christ" in this world. If we are thus in Christ, what happened to Christ happens also to us, and we rise to new life.

Christ Jesus inaugurated the new, eschatological age by embodying in himself God's intent for all humankind. Here was the "last Adam" who fulfilled the purpose for humanity that was thwarted by the first Adam and who gave new life to those caught up in the destructive ways of the old humanity (1 Corinthians 15:45).

Christ bears the image of God which is a potential in all of us. It is a potential for all of us because we were created with it (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6; James 3:7-9). Our self-centered living, however, prohibits the development and expression of this image. Only Christ reflected in and of Himself the image and glory of God, and thus only Christ is true humanity, the kind of humanity for which God created us. It is only by identifying with Christ and thus becoming God-centered, instead of self-centered, that this image of God can come to expression in us. We must become as fully members of the new humanity as we have been of the old humanity.

Barclay, William, *The Mind of St. Paul*, Harper and Row, 1958.

Bird, Phyllis, "Images of Women in the Old Testament", *Religion and Sexism* (Rosemary Reuther, editor), Simon and Schuster.

Cullman, Oscar, *The Christology of the New Testament*, Westminster Press, 1963

Florenza, Elizabeth Schussler, "Interpreting Patriarchal Traditions", *The Liberating Word* (Letty Russell, editor), Westminster Press, 1976

Fuller, Reginald, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965

Scroggs, Robin, *The Last Adam: A Study in Pauline Anthropology*, Fortress Press, 1966

Trible, Phyllis, "Eve and Adam: Genesis 2 - 3 Reread", *Andover Newton Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (March 1973)

Trible, Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Fortress Press, 1978

The Editor Comments

Contributing Editor Jeffrey Pulling's article is not intended as a point-by-point rebuttal to Karen Ziegler's "Creation Myths: Bridge to Human Wholeness" (TGC, April-May 1979). It is intended as an alternative view of the Genesis story/myth. Here are some significant contrasts:

For Ziegler, the "sacred story" is shifting. The old story is inadequate for our time and consciousness. But we need a sacred story, so it is time for a rewrite.

For Pulling, the old (Genesis) story is fully adequate "for all time." That is, it speaks for God's point of view with a timeless accuracy. The Yahwist author of Genesis 2:4b - 3 "was a feminist and ecologist."

For Ziegler, that won't do. "If 'conversion' needs to happen today on a massive scale to accommodate the full humanity of female, black, and homosexual people, and I believe it does," she argues, "somehow we need to relocate our creation stories. And we need to tell some new ones. Meanwhile, we need to defuse and devalue Genesis 1 - 3."

Pulling points to linguistic evidence that the second Genesis story isn't sexist. The earth-creature (*adham*) in 2:7 isn't male but still sexually undifferentiated. Only in 2:22-23 do male and female appear -- together. Male doesn't appear first.

Ziegler argues that the ancient Hebrew or Levite authors of the Genesis stories imply a special association of the male with divinity. Even their God generally appears as a male. She points to historical, mythical, and archaeological evidence about the nature of the historical movement of which the Genesis stories are a polemical instrument. And she says it's patriarchy, in the process of smashing feminine and matriarchal constructions on things. The God of the Hebrews was *intentionally* male. And the male, in Genesis and throughout the Hebrew Bible, commands the position of domination over the female.

Pulling further asserts that the subordination of the woman, now put in

her place in 3:16, is only a "commentary" that "describe(s) the human situation that results from sin." Thus, the curses described in 3:14-19 were not commanded by God. (Alas, the text itself doesn't put it that way. God says, "I will cause to exist the following situation, etcetera." Still, one could say that the curses don't represent God's original intent.)

Ziegler claims that as a polemic for the patriarchy, the story could well have been aimed at the Goddess, who was, in ancient symbology, associated with the image of the serpent. She claims that, on any account, it's the beginning of a patriarchal, anti-feminine tradition.

One would have to read the *rest* of the Old Testament with eyes closed to miss the obvious. The Genesis stories stand at the beginning of the entire Old Testament, which is its context, and the Old Testament is sexist. Read in context the Sodom narrative in Genesis 19, and its parallel Gibeah narrative in Judges 19. The absolute value is placed on the male quest. Next in importance is just plain males. Least in value are women; even if they're your own daughters, they don't rate. The laws of Leviticus are applied unevenly to men and women. More obvious, the authors are male, the rulers are male, and God is male. That's the overarching context of Ziegler's argument.

Pulling points us to some welcome news that the linguistics of Genesis 2-3 aren't as sexist as we thought. But how much, given this larger context, does it matter? Maybe a great deal, for those not ready to face the sexism of the larger context. Maybe someone will be thereby liberated. Pulling also defuses a central source of the sex-negative attitudes of the Church when he shows that sexuality begins in the Garden, *before* the "Fall."

For Pulling, salvation is in a sense a return to the primordial state of the Garden, at least insofar as it signifies God's original intent for human life. The "Second Adam" introduces the possibility of a new humanity freed from the cycle of despair and death into which we're all locked in a solidarity of doom with the first Adam. But if Adam is not to be identified with the male, *ish*, why then does Genesis itself speak of "Adam and his wife" (3:20-21, 4:1)?

Phyllis Tribble has an answer for that: the text from 3:20 onward simply reflects the distorted state into which humanity has now fallen. Now, Adam *is* identified with the male, but God would-

n't have wanted it that way, oh, no. But then, why is it that the God of the patriarch's Bible always seems to endorse that arrangement -- where male is boss and female is property? Once again, Pulling's argument works fairly well only *without* the larger context. Consider Genesis 2:4b-3 by itself, and you can defend the argument that its author was a feminist. Consider it in the context of the whole Old Testament, and you find God less feminist than the Yahwist author is alleged to be. Also less feminist is the prophet Isaiah, who is supposed to speak for Yahweh, but who is both shocked and offended that women should hold positions of authority in society (Isaiah 3:12). Consider Genesis 2:4b-3 in the context of the history of religion and myth -- as Ziegler pleads that we do -- and it fits a dualistic scheme of male domination. Or consider it against the interpretation Paul assigns to it in First Corinthians, which Pulling cites frequently on the subject of salvation. Here, Paul just doesn't understand the linguistic argument about *adham* as sexually undifferentiated. He insists both that man came before woman and that man is therefore to rule over woman (1 Corinthians 11:7-8).

So for Ziegler, salvation comes when we continue the story and transcend the mentality of the ancient writers. The New Humanity cannot be found in a male God, but in a God who won't play the dualist game. Life is one whole and God embraces all of it.

That must mean that for us, Christ must transcend the maleness of the historical Jesus. And it's why, for us, the most unnerving part of Pulling's argument comes at the end, when he refers to Christ using masculine pronouns. Is that really the bottom line of Christian faith, after all? We hope it isn't.

The central issue continues to be a preoccupation with biblical authority, understood in a way that refuses to allow the Bible to be the kind of human witness it is: finite and fallible. It is good to know that an isolated unit of the biblical story may be less sexist and dualistic than we had thought. That does not, however, diminish the proportions of the sexist and dualist content of the rest of the Bible. Our salvation will have to include liberation from the compulsive need to believe that the biblical writers are always right.

TGC thanks Jeffrey Pulling for another view, and invites further responses.

—FJD

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

THE GAY CHRISTIAN is a theological journal of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Its purpose is to build community among people of faith who happen also to be gay, women, or members of other sexual minorities by providing a theological soundingboard and relevant ecumenical news. **TGC** writers speak for themselves: their viewpoints do not necessarily represent any official policy, position, or doctrine of UFMCC.

Material in this magazine is original unless otherwise noted. Please credit **THE GAY CHRISTIAN** when quoting from us. Contents are copyrighted and may not be reproduced or extensively quoted without permission.

F. Jay Deacon, Editor

Editorial Offices:

PO Box 2392, Chicago IL 60690
[312] 922-5822

Circulation and Advertising:

Department of Publications,
UFMCC
5300 Santa Monica Blvd / 304
Los Angeles CA 90029
[213] 464-5100

Contributing Editors: **New York:** Karen Ziegler, Susan Moyes. **Boston:** Edward T. Hougen. **Chicago:** Kenneth Martin. **Detroit:** Jean Gralley. **Los Angeles:** Jeff Pulling, Donna Wade. **San Francisco:** Michael England. **Denver:** Dusty Pruitt. **Milwaukee:** Valerie Bouchard. **St. Louis:** Roy Birchard.

CORRECTION

The statement in last issue, page 11, "And, as Donna Wade, who edited *In Unity* when Karen Ziegler's article appeared, the women who have joined the men-folks have had plenty of years of social programming in which to become male-identified," was missing a critical word. It should have read, "as Donna Wade, who edited *In Unity* when Karen Ziegler's article appeared points out . . ." Our regrets for the blunder, Donna. The wording seems to imply that Donna Wade is an example of the phenomenon described. She isn't, and our consolation in having made the error is knowing she knows we know she isn't.

Expiating a pettiness

IN THE 1923 revolutionary poem "The Snake" by English poet D. H. Lawrence, a narrator describes how a poisonous snake innocently drinks from a fountain in his Sicilian garden while the narrator stares, transfixed, standing in his pyjamas in the shadow of the smoking volcano Etna. "Voices in me said, If you were a man/You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off," the speaker recalls. Instead, he feels honored to have the snake as a guest and longs to talk to him -- that is, until the snake retreats into "the burning bowels of this earth," into "that horrid black hole," at which time the narrator, yielding to the voices of his education, flings a log at the creature, who escapes "in undignified haste." Immediately the narrator regrets his deed: "I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!/I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education." He concludes:

And so, I missed my chance
with one of the lords
of life.
And I have something to
expiate;
A pettiness.

Now, 56 years after Lawrence shocked the literary world with "The Snake," the voices of our accursed human education are still telling us that sexuality is wrong. Only a very few people have learned, as Lawrence insists, that guilt itself about healthy sexuality is the real evil. Those who would hurl logs at vibrant, affirmative sensuality indeed miss their chance with one of the lords of life, committing what Lawrence roundly and rightly designates as the sin of "pettiness."

Witness the House of Bishops of ECUSA in Denver, 1979, which dared to appropriate the venerable term *pastoral* for a document in which they refer without distinction to all lesbian and gay male sexual congress as *liaisons*.

Witness the laws of two-thirds of our states which still make felons of most married heterosexuals as well as of most homosexuals because of the kind of sensual

Louie Crew is the founder of Integrity, the organization of gay Episcopalians. He is associate professor of English at the University of Wisconsin/Stevens Point, and author of the Gay Academic (ETC Publications 1978).

By Louie Crew

celebrations we adults undertake in the privacy of our own homes.

More importantly, witness our own self-oppression as in myriads of ways we deny, degrade, or otherwise devalue God's glorious gift of generous genital sexuality. In our culture, sexuality is more important for selling toothpaste, automobiles, and even linoleum, than it is for bringing one into loving intimacy with one's girl friends, one's boy friends, or one's self.

Lawrence insisted on re-educating himself as to what *should* evoke his guilt, and so must we vigilantly re-educate ourselves if we are to understand the real evils abroad in our midst. Initially we receive our conscience, our sense of right and wrong, not as some anatomical appendage or as a kind of heavenly dry cell charged to keep us on course for life, but as our reduction of what we perceive the public around us, most especially our parents and our friends, want us to perceive as right and wrong. As the song from *South Pacific* put it: "You have to be taught to hate and to fear; it has to be drummed in your dear little ear; you have to be carefully taught." If our culture is racist, sexist and capitalist, commonly we will be prone to anger less when women or blacks are slurred than when even the smallest items of our private property are in jeopardy, as when a watch or a radio or even a mere \$5 dollars is missing. Typically we learn early lessons very thoroughly, and our consciences are strong in their resistance to re-education.

When INTEGRITY was only three months old and I still knew very few gay Christians personally, I wrote a draft of a Lenten litany of Gay Confession, designed to help re-educate my own conscience:

For our failures joyfully to witness Christ's love for the Gay community, forgive us, Lord.

For the times that we have wasted our energies in destructive self-hatred rather than in redeemed affirmation, forgive us, good Lord.

For the times that we have ignored the sins of our minds by worrying about the beauty of our bodies, enlighten us, good Lord.

For failing to listen and receive your beautiful affirmation of us, even when we have been quietly, lovingly visited by you

unawares in our assignments with strangers, have patience with us, Lord.

For our cowardice in failing to reach isolated gay young people with our many examples of mature adult gay sexuality, forgive us, Lord, and strengthen us for these tasks.

For our failures to call upon you to relieve us of our great oppression and for our unwillingness to trust you to give us the victory, forgive us, Lord.

For our fears of losing respectability when those fears have been greater than our fears of losing our souls, redeem us, good Lord.

For the times when we have more than thrice denied our sisters and brothers in the temples of our enemies, forgive us, good Lord.

For the times that we have unquestioningly accepted the established sexism, racism, and classism of our society, forgive us, good Lord.

For our failure to respect healthy lesbian and gay male styles which differ from our own, forgive us, good Lord.

For our fawning before the power of bishops, other clergy, and laypersons when they have asked us to betray our sisters and brothers by delaying justice, forgive us, Lord.

For our failures to affirm and strengthen our sisters and brothers when they are vulnerably open in their Christian witness, forgive us, Lord.

For our reluctance to share our joy and affection with genuine nongays who could thereby be made aware of our full humanity, forgive us, Lord.

For the times that we have felt guilty when we have offered genuine affection that has been rejected, forgive us, Lord.

For the times that we have wanted not to acknowledge the full humanity of our companions, forgive us, good Lord.

For the times that we have poured on ourselves rather than on our oppressors our just anger and resentment of our oppression, forgive us, Lord.

For the times that we have failed to honor your presence in the gay temples of our own bodies, forgive us, Lord.

*Forgive us and reform us, Lord; lift us to our feet as Children of God, joint heirs with Christ. Deliver us from groveling self-pity. Fill us with health and grace. AMEN.**

*From INTEGRITY: Gay Episcopal Forum, Vol. 1, no. 4 (February 1975), 1.

After almost five years, I find that many of the sentences are still important in ongoing confessions. My re-education of my own conscience is a slow process indeed.

○

Lawrence affirms genitalia. Heterosexuals are typically so obsessed with the genitalia of lesbians and gay men that often I exert major energies to direct our dialogue away from genitalia to the more casual registers of our experience. Although we don't enjoy a reputation for our discretion, lesbians and gay males have always been far more discreet about our private lives than have our heterosexual neighbors; we have had to be discreet in order to survive. E.g., we don't normally tie streamers and tin cans to our cars and go honking down the main street waving a license to have intercourse. Maybe such dubious "privileges" will come with our emancipation, but I personally hope that we will keep some of our inherited decorum in our public displays of affection. Nevertheless, in our legitimate resistance against the attempts to define us exclusively by our genital experiences, we must not overreact and thereby fail to affirm genital experience.

When Christ heals, typically the patients are said to be "made whole." The sexual sickness which the Church prescribes for us, as well as for most heterosexuals, is the guilt which we are urged to feel about one of God's greatest gifts, namely our natural ability to reach out in passion for other people! My files bulge with letters of Christian folks literally screaming for joy in their discovery that God really does intend for their bodies to experience beautiful sexual ecstasy. One priest I know has just resigned his cure to take six months in New York City just to readjust to the fact that for the first time in his life, now well into his fifties, he can enjoy being physical with another human being. Now he knows in his flesh the flow of energy that Christ felt go out of his garment when the woman touched him for healing! This priest, a musician, tells me that now even the sensuality of his music takes on richer dimensions for him than it did when his passion was merely intellectual during the years of duress with enforced celibacy.

A celibate gay Jewish friend in Georgia was recently rescued from the brink of suicide by his late realization that his heterosexual psychiatrist, a major voice of his education, was never really going to listen to him: I kept wanting to tell him about how attractive men seemed to me,

but he kept interrupting to ask me to talk about my fears of Father or to expand on what I don't like about Mother. I realized slowly that he didn't really care about any of this talk so long as he got his check, that I could die and just be one more case statistic. As if in a moment I saw that if I were to have a chance to live, I would have to save myself!"

Wasted down to a mere 95 pounds, this wisp of a human being discovered his right to be whole. Even before fleshing out and shedding some of his premature octogenarian mannerisms, my friend told all in his sparkling eyes, a veritable Lazarus raised from the dead! Hallelujah. When I talked to him last week on the phone, he told me how one young gay friend takes him 50 miles to a club in Atlanta each week. My friend is still just looking. I look forward to the day soon when he calls to celebrate his investment of his virginity in a loving, affectionate relationship. No mere *liaison*, let the House of Bishops please take note.

Christ tells us that a special place in perdition is reserved for those who have caused these little ones to have to stumble so fearfully in discovering the truth.

Of course, we must never forget that some never discover their wholeness in time. This news clipping from June 7, 1979, in the *BLADE* in Washington is all too familiar to those of us who read the lesbian and gay male press:

MINISTER TAKES OWN LIFE FOLLOWING ARREST

Less than 48 hours after his arrest for soliciting an undercover policeman, a Baptist minister was found shot to death in the bathroom of his church office, an apparent suicide.

The body of the Rev. Paul Ray Turner, 40, an associate minister of the Glen Burnie Baptist Church, was discovered the morning of Saturday, May 12, by the church's senior pastor, the Rev. James Bishop. In addition to the body, Bishop found a note in which Turner apologized for the trouble he had caused.

Turner's arrest in a wooded area near the Baltimore-Washington International Airport on the afternoon of May 10 had left him feeling depressed, according to a member of the police vice squad who participated in the arrest.

Rev. Turner's depression apparently was not lessened when he was told Friday evening that a local paper planned to run a story of the arrest

in its Saturday edition. He was informed of this by Rev. Bishop, who advised him to tell his wife of the arrest before the paper published the story.

Turner's death was mourned the following Monday, four days after his arrest, by nearly 350 friends and parishioners who attended the funeral services at his church. His arrest and subsequent suicide left many of them in a state of shock, unable to explain how a man they had all admired could come to such an end.

"He was one of the kindest, gentlest persons...a hard-working man," said the church secretary. "He did a lot of good," added a deacon. And the Rev. Cline Vice, former pastor of the church, who, along with Rev. Bishop, presided over Turner's memorial service, called the death "a great personal loss for me."

(May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace, and may light perpetual shine upon the. AMEN)

By contrast, in Denver on the Sunday opening General Convention, Fr. Ric Kerr, long-time rector of a ghetto parish, which he had pastored into vigorous new life, spoke for the first time clearly identifying himself to the parish and to the host of dignitaries present for the dedication of a new community wing which Ric himself had helped into being: "As a member of the gay community, I have a special interest in seeing that we thus remember to keep our church a place where all members of the community are welcome!" That was the only reference. Short and sweet, packed with all of the courage needed to touch the hem of Christ's garment, to reclaim his own wholeness. There in an obligatory token appearance with the black community, the Presiding Bishop looked on, double-blinked for a moment, and went on about business as usual, as if Ric had never spoken. Bishop Burgess, the main preacher, shared only canned eloquence after we had moved back into the nave; his prepared text yielded no space to acknowledge, even if slightly, that Christ was alive in Fr. Kerr's courageous testimony. In the interval of moving back into the nave, one guest priest in the audience called to his wife across the garden, "Honey, come get this purse of yours, cause folks are staring!" In other words, the voices of our accursed human education babbled on even with Christ newly incarnate in their midst.

I believe with Lawrence that expiation

is required for all such pettiness. I believe that those who malign genital sexuality malign the Creator. My vision of the Creator is vastly different from that described by the voices of our accursed human education:

WATCHING THE WATCHER

*I watched God when He made
Adam's penis,
matching it with His own,*

*checking it out for size,
for accordian ability,
and for fit in a dozen orifices;
and I swear he was happy,
did not draw the curtain,
never smirked,
but winked,
even blinked in anticipation.*

*I watched God as She made
Eve's vagina,
measuring it with Her*

*delicate fingers, nudging
out a dimension, adding
springs, nectar, slush;
rejecting the notion of a
finger-like protrusion
self-insertable at the entrance;
purring to be experiencing
for the first time
the joy for which Eve
was being made.*

L. Crew

"The Trinity is equal, but Jesus is more equal"

IN GEORGE ORWELL'S *Animal Farm* the animals set out to form a democratic government. Something goes wrong, though, and the original ideal is perverted to, "All animals are equal, but some animals are *more* equal." I feel there is a Jesus Only or Jesus First outlook whose view is becoming "the Trinity is equal, but Jesus is *more* equal."

Most people know intellectually that the Trinity as a whole is God, three persons in One. But in practice many tend to emphasize one person. So the common wisdom has become that we *must* "say the name of Jesus," "pray to Jesus" and our relationship is not with God, but with *Jesus*.

Over the thousands of years of our existence, humanity has struggled to understand God. God *is* God and does not change as the eons pass. But humanity is changing and growing, and we continue to grow in our understanding and relationship to God.

Theology isn't off somewhere in an ivory-tower realm reserved for scholars. Every Christian does theology. We all have concepts of what God is. Every congregation has a collective theology. It may not be expressed as a formal theology, at least not in words. But the way we think about God is expressed in our actions, in the way our worship flows and even in the way our sanctuary furniture is arranged.

Jesus told us that God's nature *is* love. Out of that love, God goes on reaching out to us. God reached out as the human person of Jesus, a radical thrust into history, a radical act of love for us. This was part of God's continuing act of revelation to us through Jesus who is the Christ who *is* God. The incarnation of Christ showed us that God is part of us; that God loves us; that God *understands* us; that God is CLOSE to us.

BY MICHAEL ENGLAND

Ancient and pagan religions tried to make sense of the cosmos. They struggled to understand it by worshipping gods made in their own image. These gods behaved very much as they did but possessed transcendent powers over parts of creation. Then came the startling realization and insight that gods are not in our image, but that, quite differently, we are made in the image of *God*. It was at this turning point that humans could finally begin to realize that there is One God, Yahweh, who is Holy, Other.

God goes on helping us as we seek step by step to understand God's revelation to us. The Christian Church continues to develop this understanding. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of these developments. The seeds of it are in Scripture, but not its explicit form. While the doctrine of the Trinity is part of the truth, it is not *the* objective Truth about God. It is a human way of beginning to comprehend the vastness of God.

After all, how can we understand God who both creates and sustains the universe and cares actively for each individual? How can the human mind relate to God? We cannot expect to understand, to comprehend God. If we could do that, we would be God. The Creator is greater than the creature. The doctrine of the Trinity is our way of seeing aspects of God in manageable human ways because we cannot possibly think about the fullness of God in any way but with awe and even, perhaps, alienation. This was part of the gift of God to us in Jesus Christ. God reaches out to us, loves us and *wants* us.

There is a modern tendency, especially among more evangelical and conservative expressions of Christianity, to worship

Jesus and to relegate the persons of the Creator and Holy Spirit to lesser emphases. Sometimes this worship of Jesus can even exclude the word Christ. These people are becoming known as "Jesus only Christians" or "Second Person unitarians." The tendency began, in its current vogue, with "Jesus people" and was passed on to the current "born again movement." But its roots lie in one of the first heresies which assaulted the basics of our Christian faith.

It isn't hard to understand how some Christians can slip into worshipping Jesus above the other persons of the Godhead. Many have lived with a religion which was impersonal and somewhat irrelevant to their lives. It is exciting and relevant to identify with the person of Jesus, who was tangible and caring and who hurt as we do. That is, after all, one of the great joys for us in understanding the incarnation.

But God as Creator, Parent has often been left out. Many Christians have, without knowing it, a kind of Deistic theology in which the person of the Creator runs the universe, moves in occasionally to punish and control, but who is vaguely huge and grand and far off.

Somewhere along the line, many people have also lost touch with the Holy Spirit. True, many people are claiming their relation to the person of the Holy Spirit again. But even they are frequently confining this to rather "supernatural" expressions of the Spirit -- a few of the gifts Paul listed, emotion and parts of experience which are little removed from the reality of human life.

Part of the problem is identifying too specifically with the human, historical person of Jesus. The person we as Christians are to worship is *Jesus Christ*. The Prologue to the Fourth Gospel tells us Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God and is now with God. There is no "the" in

the Greek -- it is a process or quality of beginning, not a point of beginning.) In these first eighteen verses, the writer was addressing the fact that people were beginning to make Christ secondary or even deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Prologue says that Jesus Christ was God in beginning and is God now.

We must not limit the person of Christ to the human limitation accepted for a brief space of history. Jesus accepted the limitation of a male body and the limitations of a human outlook and human knowledge. But Jesus Christ whom we worship is God and is not limited in any way by any human characteristic.

Perhaps the greatest gift I can pass on is the gift of claiming intimacy with Jesus Christ. Christ relates to us in the intimacy of what we are. Christ is more intimate than our closest friend or sister or brother. I relate this to my warm memory of long evenings in my seminary dormitory. My best friend and I would sit smoking our pipes (our first big act of defiance and sophistication in an anti-smoking Baptist school) and talking about who we were and who we hoped to be. It was to him I first revealed myself as gay and it was he who, after struggling with the knowledge for days, learned that our friendship was real and his fear of gays wasn't. *That's the kind*

of best friend intimacy I claim for my relationship with Jesus Christ.

But Jesus Christ isn't all. God touches me at toher points of my being. The Holy Spirit is *part* of me, as Christ is beside me. As a Christian, the Holy Spirit is that expression of God that *is* me, that is within me. This is not a disembodied force, like some powerful ghost. The Holy Spirit *is* God living and speaking in me, the "still, small voice" of the Old Testament. The Spirit is that movement within my self which is part of my self; not laid on like a veneer but built in as part of my being when I accept God.

The Creator/Parent is a view of God's transcendence where God touches me as guiding parent, as my maker, in discipline -- a great, awesome and eternal authority. The gothic arches of a traditional cathedral are *intended* to remind me of this aspect of God. They inspire this feeling of awe and the assurance of security knowing that God will care for me and protect me.

All three are God, touching different parts of my perception. I cannot perceive God's wholeness, so I look at these aspects of God. This doctrine doesn't sum God up. We go on, as we grow, discovering God daily in the Creator, Christ and Holy Spirit for all of our lives.

To emphasize only the intimacy, only

the best friend/sibling, is to miss the fullness of God. It leads to great distortion. It lessens our personal faith and narrows our Christian outlook and ministry. To some extent, I believe this is a problem within our Fellowship. Christ is not *all* of the faith. The human person of Jesus is certainly not all there is to the person of Christ.

Jesus Christ as best friend, as that person who is most intimate, with whom we share all, who knows us as no other is very important to us. As the Gaithers' song says, "The One who knows you best, loves you most." We know that Christ stands next to us laughing, crying, grieving and celebrating *with* us. And we must know that this is not *part* of God, not a god, but "God with us."

The Holy Spirit is God *in* us and the Creator is God making, loving and guiding us. All are One God, here and now at this moment as you read. God knows in this moment that we are human, knows you and I are seeing and feeling different things, even in the difference between my writing and your reading. I encourage you to take all of God. Talk to Christ; let the Holy Spirit move freely as your heart; let the Creator wrap nurture around you. Learn to be a *God* First Christian.

Baptism in the new community

By Larry J. Uhrig

The practice of offering Baptism by Water available in every Sunday worship service began at MCC Washington, D.C. in early 1979. It arose out of the encounter between the Word of God (the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch -- Acts 8:26-40), the need of the community (to know Christ), and the responsibility of the preacher (to offer all the gifts which enable the person and the community to be reconciled to God through Christ).

THE PRACTICE

In our traditional worship we offer the people opportunity to pray, praise, sing, hear the Word read and proclaimed, and receive the sacrament of the altar, Holy Communion. Further, we offer the laying on of hands and anointing with oil for healing of body, mind and spirit. In

this context, what prevents us from offering the sacrament of water Baptism to a person who requests it?

In practice, when an adult has requested baptism, ministers have sought, usually through counseling, to ascertain what the candidate for Baptism understands its meaning to be. We have sought to assure ourselves that their understanding of the meaning of Baptism falls within the boundaries of orthodox Christian Doctrine. We have not so consistently shown this concern for Infant Baptism or Holy Communion. While we have been increasingly willing to view communion as the "mystery of faith" or the "Holy Mystery", we have at the same time been more rigorous in attempting to define and control the sacrament of Baptism.

When Philip met the Ethiopian Eunuch, he:

1. Went to where the Eunuch was;
2. Began where he was and interpreted the Good News of Jesus to him;
3. Responded to the Eunuch's request -- "There is water, what is to prevent me from being baptised?" -- by baptising him.

Our task is no different. We are to present the Word of God to people where they are: geographically, economically, educationally and spiritually. How can we choose *not* to allow a person to respond to our preaching by being baptised? The Word converts: How can we not provide the corporate acting out of that change of heart -- Baptism. The Word heals: How can we not provide the corporate acting out of healing -- laying on of hands and anointing with oil. The Word reconciles: How can we not provide the corporate acting out of reconciliation, conversion and healing -- Holy Communion. The liturgy of the church must offer and celebrate all of the

dimensions of the faith. In the drama and action of the liturgy we move from nonfaith to faith, from death to life, from no people to God's people. Does our practice in worship show forth this faith?

THE REASON

We Baptise for the same reason John the Baptist baptised:

"I myself did not know him, but for this I came baptising with water; that he might be revealed to Israel." John 1:31

Like John the Baptist, we come bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. The world to whom we preach is not unlike the world to whom John brought his message. The church has become pharisaic and legalistic, seeking salvation through the laws and ordinances of both church and state. The people we preach to are largely "unchurched," having left the church for a multitude of reasons. Indeed, the fields are ripe for harvest. We are called to preach to these multitudes who do not know the Christ of our proclamation, who have lived under the law and have not known the Grace of God's unrestrained love given in Jesus Christ. As John prepared the way for the coming of Christ, so we in these times also baptise to prepare the way for the Christ who comes again.

Therefore we baptise for the same reason John did, "that He (Jesus Christ) might be revealed." This is a bold act of faith, for in the practice of this sacrament

the church is confessing that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, God will respond to the intent of faith by making known God's son, Jesus, to the one baptised. Here the prerequisite for baptism becomes the seeking, searching faith of the one who wants to meet the Christ. This is a radical departure from the tradition that requires a confession of faith to precede the event of Baptism. In this act, the confession is implicit in the act and proceeds from it. Here the worshipping community must trust in God's acting.

This interpretation arises out of an evangelical concern that the church bring all persons to Christ. It rises from a spirituality that trusts in the Holy Spirit to reveal the Christ to the one who seeks. This practice also removes the barriers to Baptism erected by the church. These barriers have been built, in part, on modern western rationalism, which dictates that one must understand the full meaning of the Christ Event in order to enter into the Body of Christ. Our interpretation rests upon the biblical witness of John the Baptist and the work of the Spirit through the early church in the Acts of the Apostles, not upon the doctrine of baptism developed later by the church.

GOD'S ACTION

The sacrament of baptism is a dying and rising. It is offered to all who seek for Christ to be revealed to them. It is also offered to those who, like the Ethiopian Eunuch, confess, repent, believe in Christ and desire to lead a new

life. In our "unchurched" community we offer the sacrament to those who have fallen away from the church, even to those who were once baptised as a child. We do so because we know that returning to faith means the offering of one's whole life to God in Christ. Therefore we can and do celebrate this reunion by plunging all of life into the waters of baptism. One's entire life and lifestyle is immersed in the life of Christ as one is baptised a new creature. We offer this sacrament to all who have never been baptised, those who have been united with Christ, those who are reunited with Christ, those who come seeking Christ and those who come having found Christ.

In every event of baptism, in every situation of human need addressed in baptism, God is the one who acts. God does the revealing of God's love, God's Grace, and God's Son. The church provides the context, the community, the body in which the healing is accomplished, as the Spirit works through its members. The difficult task for the clergy is no different than it has ever been; we are called to act in faith and to trust that God will act in response to our faith. But the foundation stone must be this: This practice of baptism is dependent on bold and uncompromising preaching of the Word of God, for the Sacrament of Baptism is a response to the hearing of the Word and the moving of the Spirit. Every age must hear the word of the Ethiopian's response to Philip's preaching: "What is to prevent me from being baptised?"

Do we make water available?

Methodists bar ordination

... AND OTHER LATE NEWS ...

INDIANAPOLIS -- The United Methodist Church voted in April to bar "self-avowed practicing" homosexuals from ministry, even after adopting guidelines for judging the credentials of ministry candidates that don't specify homosexuality as a disqualification.

That vote didn't do homosexual candidates any good, though. The 996 delegates to the General Conference of the 9.7 million member denomination also voted this: "No self-avowed practicing homosexual shall be ordained or appointed in the United Methodist Church." And a lopsided vote retains *this* in the Book of Discipline: "We do not condone the practice of homosexuality

and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teachings."

Riling gay observers more was the extension of a mechanism for trying clergy suspected of practices "incompatible with Christian teaching," presumably to be interpreted according to the Book of Discipline. And, lay people can now be tried, too. Once a Methodist is found to be a real live homosexual, such a one may be severed from membership in the church. That's to protect other Methodists from getting bit by the lavender mosquito. Further, Bishops may now require forced leaves of absence from ministry with no trial or hearing procedure whatever.

Not everybody liked the decision. Hundreds of pink triangles were seen on the closing day. TGC's sources at the festivities thought the press had rotten

attitudes, too. Chances are you didn't read about this in your local Gazette. You didn't see any pink triangles on the CBS Evening News. Nary a word in the New York Times. Next issue, an interview with a Methodist seminary student freshly disqualified by his local Council on Ordained Ministry, on accounta he's gay.

TALLAHASSEE -- About 30 MCCers trekked from Jacksonville to Tallahassee in April to support local gay Christians facing harassment. Half of those participating in the 160 mile hike came from the Northeast District; the other half from the Southeast. As they trekked, they picked up mixed reviews in the press -- which got better the farther west they travelled. There were no major mishaps and only mild peltings with bottles and untoward comments. (More next issue.)

Reviewed:

Hans Kung, *Truthfulness: The Future of the Church*. New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968.

John R. Fry, *The Great Apostolic Blunder Machine: A Contemporary Attack Upon Christendom*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978

LAST ISSUE, TGC reported that the Vatican had censured popular theologian Hans Kung. Kung continues to teach at Tübingen (it's a government job) but is no longer authorized by the Roman Catholic Church to represent the Church in teaching students for the priesthood.

Also in the last issue, we ran a piece by John R. Fry, another critic of the institutional church.

Now, we offer this comparative review of Kung's, and Fry's major critiques.

○

Kung may yet lose not only the pontifical Catholic chair but his job, too. According to the terms of a treaty on church-state relations signed by Germany and the Vatican back in 1933, a Roman Catholic theology professor can't teach without church authorization. So far, Kung refuses to leave.

The controversy over Kung centers in Rome's perception of him as more of a liberal Protestant than a Catholic. You'd get that impression of him from, say, *The Church* (1967) or *On Being a Christian* (1976). Kung would put it differently. In an unusual two-thirds page op-ed piece in the January 28 *New York Times* called "Why I remain A Catholic," he tries to nudge the words "Roman" and "Catholic" farther apart. He opposes "Roman bureaucracy" and "ingrown Roman absolutist claims from the Middle Ages." He says some cardinals' and bishop's thinking may be more Roman than Catholic. And he argues that "Catholic" really means "whole," the "universal, comprehensive, total

Church." Anyone with that commitment, says Kung, is a Catholic theologian. Much of his career has been spent trying to dissolve the distinctions that define Protestant versus Catholic.

Rome doesn't seem to buy his definition, nor do a massive number of his colleagues.

But Kung is popular and colorful. His books sell well. Like *Truthfulness: The Future of the Church*. That rankles those who think he's some Protestant radical. It annoys others who think he's just shallow, and scarcely bold and prophetic at all.

If you're looking for renewal and for truth in the church, is Kung an effective guide? How on target is Kung's exercise in prophetic criticism of the church?

○

Well into his book Hans Kung opines: "Faith is corrupted when it becomes intellectually dishonest, when -- that is -- it suppresses, forgets, shuts out genuine rational difficulties as genuine doubts, instead of facing up to them with complete truthfulness." (91). Trouble is, he shows only minimal resolve to take his own advice. The words are too easily said and by themselves are not remarkable at all.

I can't be sure of Kung's intent in writing TRUTHFULNESS. Fact is, I'm really puzzled about the purpose of the book. I found much of it offensive and hypocritical. Especially when you consider the title. Maybe it represents a sincere concern for truth. If so, Kung has a peculiar, churchly concept of truth -- the kind of "truth" that turns efforts like his

book into live-and-in-color exhibits of how truth gets bent especially in churches and other institutions greatly concerned with their own preservation and honor.

Even while it sets out to face and account for error -- famous forms of error like the church's response to Galileo -- this dreadful book also sets out to discredit any and all who doubt the infallible doctrinal authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Kung is troubled by some obvious instances of such error, and here, in these pages, you see him agonize about the problem of error in the church while never yet allowing himself to let go of his implicit trust that the Holy Spirit gives such special assistance to the magisterium, the councils and popes and the tradition they create that the Roman Catholic Church is "far above . . . all deception" and error on those matters that really count. Thus, the errors have to do only with "details" (see especially pp 133-138).

Here is the kind of inconsistency I find so offensive in the church (it's been so much a part of my churchly life that I react strongly to it when it re-appears in another theologian):

He prods his church to accept as errors the silly -- sometimes deadly -- teachings that trouble him and trouble enough others in the church as to be vastly unpopular, like the condemnation of Galileo or Teilhard or the continuing condemnation of birth control or the obvious error about the impossibility of salvation for non-Catholics, an especially obvious example

since the church has actually reversed its position on the subject, allowing the possibility that even atheists might be saved.

He pushes the modern church on the issue of a celibate priesthood, sure the church's position is wrong. He believes that radical 180 degree turns in position on such issues are healthy, representing *metanoia*, which is supposed to be a sign of the Spirit's presence. It won't do, he asserts, just to say the new position is a "development" thoroughly consistent with "what the church has always taught." It's *change*, he insists. And that's right.

That's what he says about the church's positions with which *he* cannot, personally, live.

This is what he says about those who cannot live with the church's position on issues where he does not want the church to change:

Those who treat "light-heartedly" the "ecclesiastical profession of faith" represent "irresponsibility" taking "revenge" on the church. Protestants are "excessively truthful." Protestants are "selective" in their reading of Scripture, falling short of Catholic "breadth" (78). Those who doubt the infallibility of the church's ancient decision about the Canon, he declares in perhaps his most incredible statement of all, do not possess the "right and duty" to ask questions of Scripture and tradition -- cannot do so with truthfulness!! (79).

Here, he requires that all who would touch the tradition first ratify afresh what the church has done in selecting what elements of the tradition to accept. His only criterion for distinguishing between what is subject to error and what is not is his extremely arbitrary and relative estimate of what "the whole church stands behind" (136-138).

But anyone who so surrenders his/her own responsibility concerning truthfulness and his/her own center has surrendered any real chance at truthfulness. He/she has handed it over to "The Apostles."

For my money, no clearer or more forthright exposition of truthfulness in the church exists than John Fry's *The Great Apostolic Blunder Machine*, especially pp 44-47. Fry is right, I'm afraid, in forecasting no significant change in the essential position of those who promulgate the contorted logic Kung offers. Clergy and theologians prefer the "authority" this magic tradition gives them. They cannot ever really take their *own* experience of life and of God seriously (Kung as much as

says so on p 78).

"Obviously," says Fry, "preachers prefer that priceless apostolic advantage to their own more-or-less equivocal and rotten experience. They will not likely give it up" (47). He epitomized what Kung is doing in a ridiculous proposition:

"The New Testament says the Apostles say God says . . ."

You can add a few steps to the sequence, and you'll have Kung's framework of authority. Get the church in there: "The church says the New Testament says the Spostles say God says the church (our variety of it, represented by the magisterium or whatever says what it is the church is to be understood as saying) is a divine creation." Kung's quest for "truthfulness" miraculously leaves that logic intact. The errors, he insists, are all marginal.

Fry makes the following recommendations, sure to affect the future of the church in the direction of truthfulness if anybody heeds:

Let theologians gain some distance from the mind-bending Theological Machine that dominates the church so they can for once tell the truth, not the party-line, politically-conditioned Official Version.

Let theologians "get out from under apostolic authorities which seek silently and effectively to run their thought. Theologians should run their own thought."

Let theologians "honor what they admit to themselves in their basic privacy and what they admit to their close friends in intimate conversation by making sure it always gets said publicly."

And finally, in line with (but more forthright and consistent than Kung's assertion (TRUTHFULNESS, 136) that the hard realities of life pose a challenge to dogma, Fry urges that theologians "write theology from the stand-point of the mother in Bombay (or Pittsburgh) whose child has just starved to death."

Here Fry's viewpoint ranges the farthest from King's. Kung holds it out as a challenge, as if it were some sort of intellectual gymnastics contest, to hold onto the dogma in spite of the evidence to the contrary (see esp. 136). Fry's counsel is honesty. Theology cannot be the same after Auschwitz. What we know as Christian theology began with "the apostles" -- a species of thinkers who thought and wrote after the fact and imposed their particular (and sometimes self-serving) interpretation on the life and times and message of Jesus. "The Church" is the creation of their preaching -- about the

resurrection, about apostolic authority, and more. We must quit ignoring the history -- so that we may also quit our "blundering attempts to find a solid divine ground outside the history before (our) eyes" (130). "While history and reason are deeply offended parties to the apostolic blunders and have ample grounds to sue," Fry reasons, "infinitely, the most aggrieved party to their blunders is God, who, we may take it, does not sue" (133).

To be liberated from the humanly created apostolic blunder machine is to face God and get ahold of authentic faith assumptions for ourselves, in all the multi-color diverse pluralism that implies. Kung's monolith, the one fountainhead of orthodoxy and unity he dreams of, must be surrendered as a road that leads to a swamp; abandoned as a wrong turn from which we must recover our bearings; finally discrediting the basis for the categories of heresy and disunity as sin.

What will we have lost if we admit the mistake?

An institution whose hold, prophetic leadership into the New seems always to follow far behind the rest of society's discovery of it? A church that congratulates itself on finally recognizing Galileo while it perpetuates sexism and idiocy about sexuality? Phooey.

The nurturing, inspiring voices of the tradition are here for me *without* that church. I can read. I can feel and observe and think. And I can share with many others who also seek authenticity. And in that quest and the community I find along the way, I think I have found something more like what Jesus and his friends experienced than even Kung's "reformed" monolith affords.

Kung's final chapter, "Outlook," by the way, offers *his* series of concrete proposals to the Roman Catholic Church. While they are indisputably less to the point than Fry's, they do suggest the sort of renewal and reform that can bring the church into closer proximity with the present level of human consciousness as it has evolved. Who but the blindest guardians of yesterday's forms and fears could not wish that churches, Catholic and Protestant, would not embrace his proposals?

But what is appalling is that, were the church to immediately accept these changes, it would still not be in a position of leadership. Kung's most passionate and progressive proposals are only proof that the prophetic is a dimension missing from his vision of truthfulness in the church.

—FJD

The beatitudes revisited

MY EXPERIENCE of God has always been rather like getting punched in the stomach. The Lord is my nag, I shall not want. Oh, once in a while it is sweet and sublime. But, mostly, God is the One who mercilessly confronts me with what I desperately do not want to know.

Last summer I took a course at a Roman Catholic seminary entitled, "The Social Implications of the Beatitudes." Sounds nice and harmless and liberal enough! I thought. But that course really opened up the Beatitudes to me in a new way. And it even led to some new Beatitudes, which I'd like to share.

The Beatitudes show up in two places in the New Testament, in Matthew 5:1-11 and Luke 6:20-23. In both gospels, the Beatitudes appear as a kind of "preamble" to the Sermon on the Mount. The issue of the real meaning of the Beatitudes is inseparable from the issues of the real purpose of the Sermon on the Mount, about which volumes have been written.

At the risk of distorting by oversimplifying, it seems to me that there are basically two loci of viewpoints concerning the Sermon on the Mount. The first, and traditional one is that the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' new and simplified substitute for the old Law; that it is in the same class with "practical wisdom," or "how to live the good life." Representatives of this view include Wilfred Harrington, Rudolph Schnackerberg, Archibald Hunter and Charles Erdman. This viewpoint casts the Sermon as new moral prescriptions, as "the new righteousness," and is held by traditional Catholics, by many evangelicals, and even by many liberal Protestants. This point of view is the reason that although the Catholic Church has never endorsed Biblical fundamentalism or literalism, it takes literally Jesus' words about divorce found in Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount.

The second viewpoint says that the Sermon is *not* essentially practical wisdom, nor was it meant to be a new moral/ethical "cookbook." Rather, it is essentially eschatological proclamation. In plain English, the Sermon on the Mount is a *theological* statement, not a new rule book. It speaks about God's

A Meditation By Nancy Wilson

Reign (the "kingdom"), and what life is/can be like when God has God's way with us and with the world. It has more affinity to Revelations 21:4 ("And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.") than to Leviticus. Representative of this view include Joachim Jeremias, Gunter Bornkamm and Norman Perrin.

This second viewpoint holds that First Century Judaism (which was neither normative for Judaism nor monolithic) had allowed the law to degenerate into rubrics. The problem with the law was not that it was too strict, but that it was not radical enough; it did not expose the roots of sin. It allowed people to sidestep the real issues. If you were rich or powerful you could always find a loophole to slip through. If you were poor, you had no hope of fulfilling the law; you were doomed from the start. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount addressed both individual and systemic sin. The peccadillos of the struggling poor were not one-tenth as offensive to Him as the blatant hypocrisy of the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the "righteous" ones who followed the letter of the law but were disobedient to God in their hearts and indifferent towards their neighbor.

I came to understand the Beatitudes in the context of this second point of view about the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are not four (in Luke) or nine (in Matthew) separate little ways of being blessed in God's eyes. They are not virtues. They are four or nine expressions of *one* reality -- the reality of what life is like when God is sovereign.

The Greek word "macarios," or "blessed" is a rich word that dominates the Beatitudes. The Good News Bible translates it "happy." Actually, it is a poetic word for "transcendent happiness." Aristotle used it to refer to the social stratum of the wealthy who don't have the cares of the frustrated poor. Jesus, then, uses stark irony when he calls

the *poor* blessed. Poverty was a *curse* to the Hebrews, never a virtue. And Jesus says that when God reigns, the poor will no *longer* be cursed. He finally did not separate the spiritual from the socio-economic, but saw them as part of one reality. In Jesus' Beatitudes, holiness and justice become part of one fabric of kingdom-becoming. The most recent articulation of this view is Jacques DuPont, *Les Beatitudes*, (not yet available in English).

As the Beatitudes shattered before me, I realized that their original intent, then, is lost to us, as is their impact. No matter how much we research the meanings of Greek words or attempt to paraphrase them, they still sound sweet. The sweetness ruins them. They were not meant to be sweet; rather, they were meant to be shocking and painful occasions of grace and truth. I wanted to write some new Beatitudes that might do justice to their original intent and impact. To do such a thing is very presumptuous, I know. But I wanted to try.

The Beatitudes are about power. God's power. The loving, paradoxical power that transforms real, earthly curses into real blessings; that Incarnates itself into cursed, despairing flesh in order to bless and redeem it. The Beatitudes are judgement and grace, inextricably bound. They are nonsense. They are secret promises, defiant poetry of the end-times. And since there is no end-time like the present (!) let us begin:

JESUS EYES PIERCE. He stands with arms folded across his chest. Though he smiles sometimes, he's real serious.

"Woe to you who seek to avoid life's 'unpleasantries,' for you will be unprepared for the kingdom."

"Blessed are you mentally retarded, for you will understand the mysteries of life."

"Blessed are you who are so deformed and so ugly that no one ever touches you, for you shall be tenderly held and caressed."

"Blessed are you who molest little children. You shall no longer hate

yourself or fear adult companionship, for the child in you will be healed from the hell of rejection."

"Woe to you who will not forgive -- you have slit the wrists of your soul."

The trouble with God is She won't let life alone. God interferes in the hopeless struggles of humanity. And Jesus the Christ will not take the "shortcut" to glory just to "get the job done." No, He gets all involved in and dances through the messiness, absurdity and silliness of our lives.

"Blessed are you who are flat broke and spend your last buck on a lottery ticket -- you shall hit the jackpot!"

"Blessed are you who spend your lives cleaning up other people's garbage; you will come up smelling like a rose."

"Blessed are you who waste away in some God-forsaken prison
Because you were

Supposed
To be a

cool
black
dude

With an
IMAGE

AND you were seventeen
and scared and
it got out of control
and
you were scared to
death
when they kicked you

on the ground
when, handcuffed, your jaw was
broken,

and you cried on the cold, wet,
concrete jail floor
ALL NIGHT LONG.

Because your mama
was too drunk
to even understand you
when you called,
much less call you a lawyer,
who you couldn't pay anyway,
and,
oh hell,
what's the use,
another
damned excuse

(me for living).

You shall be released."

"Woe to you who meanly cling and grasp
at things and power and time,
more, better, forever,
Wastelands of nothing await you
nowhere, never."

No irony escapes the Creator of the Universe. Wars over the Eucharist, saints burn at the stake. God just isn't surprised by human short-sightedness, greed or self-absorption all in the name of religion, peace, progress, country, God. God is no fool. She can take a joke.

"Woe to you preachers who want to
be rich and famous TV superstars,
your ratings will suffer in heaven."

"Blessed are you homeless 'Boat
People', you will inherit the Hyatt
Regency."

"Blessed are you lesbians and gay
men, for you have a place in the
kingdom (no, not in the closet,
sweetheart!)"

"Blessed are all you 'normal', 'ordinary' folk who pay your bills, raise your kids, watch TV, hope for the best and die in your sleep. It will all make sense someday."

"Woe to you multinational corporations who treat the world like your Monopoly game. You shall eternally pass "GO" without collecting \$200.00."

Contradictions pile up, too numerous to mention. Mysteries and paradoxes. Power in weakness. Blessings from curses. Losing to gain. First shall be last. Dying to rise. It never ends, though it ends all the time.

"Blessed are you who are tormented by injustice and feelings of helplessness over the sufferings of others, for you will get a good night's sleep."

"Blessed are you
blessed,
who choose to risk it all
to follow me.

I'll nag you forever.

Honest."

With that, Jesus finished and sat down.

Letters

When last summer's article appeared by Karen Ziegler, I expressed my support of it, even preaching about it and expressing my support unequivocally of the necessity to keep an open forum in a theological journal such as TGC. I still believe exactly the same.

On the other hand, I do not believe TGC should be used as a journal to make desultory remarks, insult or degrade. To do this is to follow the pattern as so many of

our adversaries. I had believed the staff of TGC was above this. Apparently I was wrong.

Your articles on what other churches are doing were very prejudicial. We may not agree with the decisions of other denominational bodies. On the other hand, it is a step forward that any other denominational body is at least wrestling with the issue of homosexuality. Also, in all those denominational bodies there are many devout Christians who are working hard to see changes occur. In my opinion your articles denigrate their work.

I would expect from a responsible journal a modicum of respect for other church

bodies, for varied opinions within our own church body and an objective reporting of events. To do less is to demean ourselves and not those whom we attack.

J.E. PAUL BRETON
Pastor, Trinity MCC
San Bernardino

There is a danger, we assert, in taking what is absurd and even overwhelmingly discouraging to durn seriously. Yup, we poked fun at some things that could have simply demoralized us and depressed us. We got the idea from the original March on Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-48), where, when it was obvious that what Jesus was attempting was entirely impossible, it turned out that

hope's last weapon was humor. Now our people must not respond to what the churches have done by getting depressed. Nor must our people honor and respect everything churches do. Sometimes, and we'd better face it, we'll find ourselves set against the churches and against the State and the powers that be and to stand then and not collapse you have to be able laugh.

We deeply appreciate Rev. Breton's concern for the purity of our attitudes toward our oppressors. M.K. Gandhi ought to be a significant shaper of our vision. But we can't afford, either, for the humor of these ecclesiastical actions to be lost on us.

We don't believe we've denigrated the work of devout Christians working for change. We think that, of those we referred to specifically in the news summary, all were referred to respectfully, even with admiration: several bishops, numerous protestors, Sister Kane, Joan Clark, Sonia Johnson, Walter Wink, Pat Gundry some gay caucuses, and miscellaneous others.

THE EDITOR

I received TGC today when it went on sale at MCC Toronto. I just wanted to say that I have always enjoyed TGC, and found it thought-provoking. Sometimes very thought-provoking. I was deeply disturbed

by Karen Ziegler's article last summer -- it kept me up until 4 a.m. that night, Bible and reference books at hand -- but it's led to some changes in my thinking. I was disturbed at the attempt to muzzle Karen, and regret the decision to split TGC from IN UNITY. If it means that TGC is going to keep up the quality of the issue I have just read, though, then perhaps the split will work out as a good idea. May I have permission to reprint in its entirety Steve Carson's meditation?

KARL VQN HARTEN

Editor, Metro Community News
Toronto

I have just received my copy of the new and separate TGC and wish to commend you for publishing this magazine. I trust that its future will continue to be assured, and will continue to stimulate our thinking. However, I must make some comments on the Editorial, the article by John and Carol Alice Fry, and the subsequent Editorial Update. It saddens me that at times we allow ourselves to be drawn into the same trap that we are ostensibly fighting against. Too often those who are oppressed rise up to become the new oppressors; and the

radical and liberal who seek to challenge tradition and orthodoxy, in fact, attempt to become the new orthodoxy, often with equal vengeance.

I fully support the right of Rev. Ziegler to express her reasoned views, for it does stimulate and challenge each of us (or it should) --but let us not present them as the new oracles of God, or the new way that we all ought to be treading. I admire her courage in presenting them to us, but I dislike the implied superiority of her position that others have attached to it.

There is and always will be a tension between liberal and conservative. We all should strive for this tension to be creative and stimulating rather than destructive. Let us not indulge in superiority, snideness or insinuation for they ill become us who claim to be Christian. The fact is that we are not always right. No matter how passionately we hold certain beliefs, we must respect those who sincerely oppose us and grant them the right of their own views.

HARRY de JONG
Exhorter
MCC Melbourne

TGC presents a summer conference on the future of faith in the new community*

** An Emerging Community With a New Vision of Inclusiveness*

Resources include:
Rosemary Radford Ruether,
The TGC Team,
and YOU

COME TO CHICAGO

FRI-SUN, JULY 18-20, 1980

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

For program and registration information, send this coupon to TGC / Good Shepherd Parish MCC / Box 2392 / Chicago 60690

COUPON

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE _____
ZIP _____

Please send me more information about the TGC conference on the future of faith.

COUPON